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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 IRAN RPO DUBAI 000013

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STATE FOR NEA/IR, LONDON FOR GAYLE, BAKU FOR HAUGEN, BERLIN FOR PAETZOLD

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TAGS: IR PGOV SOCI

SUBJECT: AHMADINEJAD USES UNIVERSITIES FOR POLITICAL ENDS

REF: REF A: DUBAI 006053, REF B: IRPO 0009

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CLASSIFIED BY: JILLIAN BURNS, DIRECTOR, IRAN REGIONAL PRESENCE OFFICE - DUBAI, DEPARTMENT OF STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (D)

1.(S) SUMMARY. PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD APPEARS TO BE CONTINUING HIS EFFORTS TO REORIENT UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES MORE IN LINE WITH HIS HARD-LINE IDEOLOGY, AS WELL AS USING THEM FOR HIS OWN POLITICAL GAIN. A RECENT PRESS REPORT INDICATES THAT AHMADINEJAD IS TRYING TO CHANGE THE FOUNDING COMMITTEE OF ISLAMIC AZAD UNIVERSITY (IAU). IAU HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH EXPEDIENCY COUNCIL CHAIR ALI HASHEMI RAFSANJANI AND IS OFTEN REFERRED TO AS "RAFSANJANI U" (REF A). SEPARATELY, THE CHANCELLOR OF PETROLEUM UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY CLAIMED AHMADINEJAD IS INAPPROPRIATELY INSERTING HIMSELF INTO HIS UNIVERSITY'S ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS. THE GOVERNMENT HAS ORDERED PETROLEUM UNIVERSITY'S HEADQUARTERS TO BE MOVED FROM TEHRAN TO ABADAN. THE CHANCELLOR BELIEVES THE MOTIVE IS NOT ACADEMIC BUT POLITICAL, TO APPEASE RESENTMENT IN KHUZESTAN FOR ECONOMIC INEQUITIES. IF AHMADINEJAD SUPPLANTS RAFSANJANIS INFLUENCE OVER IAU, HE WILL HAVE SUCCEEDED BOTH AT WEAKENING HIS RIVAL AND OPENING UP MORE CAMPUSES TO HIS INFLUENCE. END SUMMARY.

2.(U) DOMESTIC PRESS INDICATES THAT PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD IS INSERTING HIMSELF IN THE OVERSIGHT OF ISLAMIC AZAD UNIVERSITY (IAU), A MOVE THAT MAY BE INDICATIVE OF AN ONGOING POWER STRUGGLE WITH EXPEDIENCY COUNCIL CHAIR ALI HASHEMI RAFSANJANI. AS REPORTED IN REF A, IAU IS CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH EXPEDIENCY COUNCIL CHAIR ALI HASHEMI RAFSANJANI, WHO IS A MEMBER OF THE FOUNDING COMMITTEE (PRESUMABLY SIMILAR TO A BOARD OF TRUSTEES). WITH MORE THAN 70 CAMPUSES, IAU IS OFTEN REFERRED TO AS "RAFSANJANI U." LAST YEAR, ROOZ NEWSPAPER CLAIMED A POLITICAL SHOWDOWN WAS BUILDING BETWEEN RAFSANJANI AND AHMADINEJAD OVER CONTROL OF THE IAU SYSTEM, FEATURING CABINET ATTACKS ON IAU'S CHANCELLOR, DR. ABDOLLAH JASBI, AND CALLS FOR HIS REMOVAL. ADDITIONALLY, AHMADINEJAD CRITICIZED IAUS HIGH TUITION RATES. ROOZ SUGGESTED THAT IAU WAS THE ONLY INSTITUTION THAT AHMADINEJAD'S SUPPORTERS HAD NOT SUCCESSFULLY INFILTRATED, AND THESE STEPS WERE SALVOS IN A PROXY STRUGGLE BETWEEN AHMADINEJAD AND RAFSANJANI.

3.(SBU) ACCORDING TO CONSERVATIVE DAILY TEHRAN SIYASAT-E-RUZ, AHMADINEJAD APPOINTED A FIVE-MEMBER COMMITTEE TO PLAN CHANGING THE IAU FOUNDING COMMITTEE. FIVE OF THE SEVEN MEMBERS OF THE

FOUNDING COUNCIL OF IAU HAVE REPORTEDLY DIED OR RESIGNED, LEAVING ONLY EXPEDIENCY COUNCIL CHAIR ALI HASHEMI RAFSANJANI AND DR. JASBI. AHMADINEJAD'S ACTIONS REPORTEDLY LED DR. JASBI TO ANNOUNCE HIS INTENTION TO RETIRE. ACCORDING TO THE PRESS REPORT, AHMADINEJAD'S COMMITTEE IS COMPRISED OF MEMBERS OF THE SUPREME ISLAMIC REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL (SIRC), THE DECISION MAKER ON ALL CULTURAL, RESEARCH, AND EDUCATION MATTERS. SIRC HAS REPORTEDLY LONG BEEN DISAPPOINTED WITH IAUS EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS. (NOTE: CONTACTS HAVE ALSO MAINTAINED THAT THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION OF ISLAMIC AZAD UNIVERSITIES IS INFERIOR TO THAT OF STATE UNIVERSITIES, WHILE THE PRICE IS HIGHER. ENDNOTE) THE DAILY SURMISES THAT AHMADINEJAD WILL LIKELY GARNER THE NECESSARY SUPPORT, VIA HIS COMMITTEE, TO INFLUENCE IAU ADMINISTRATION.

4.(S) OUTLINING A SEPARATE EFFORT BY AHMADINEJAD AND HIS GOVERNMENT TO USE UNIVERSITIES FOR POLITICAL ENDS, THE CHANCELLOR OF PETROLEUM UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY TOLD IRPOFFS THAT HE HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED TO SHIFT THE UNIVERSITY HEADQUARTERS FROM TEHRAN TO KHUZESTAN. UNTIL RECENTLY, THE PETROLEUM UNIVERSITY HAD THREE BRANCHES, ONE IN AHVAZ, ONE IN ABADAN, AND ONE IN THE NORTH, PLUS THE MAIN CAMPUS IN TEHRAN. THE CHANCELLOR BELIEVED HIS HEADQUARTERS WERE BEING MOVED IN AN EFFORT TO ASSUAGE KHUZESTAN PROVINCE, WHICH HAS OFTEN COMPLAINED OF NEGLECT FROM THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. HE CALLED THE DIRECTIVE INAPPROPRIATE, NOTING THAT UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES ARE SACROSANCT AND SHOULD NOT BE USED AS A TOOL FOR POLITICAL GAIN. WHILE IT IS POSSIBLE THE CHANCELLOR WAS SIMPLY PEEVED AT THE RESTRUCTURING, HE MAINTAINED THE UNIVERSITY WAS BETTER SERVED BY MORE DIRECT ACCESS TO OTHER IMPORTANT INSTITUTIONS IN THE CAPITAL.

5.(U) THESE MOVES FOLLOW EARLIER REPORTS THAT PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD WAS ATTEMPTING TO PURGE LIBERAL AND SECULAR PROFESSORS FROM UNIVERSITIES. PROFESSORS WHO ESPOUSE LIBERAL VIEWS, PARTICULARLY THOSE IN THE HUMANITIES FIELD, WERE BEING FIRED, FORCED TO RETIRE, OR SIMPLY DENIED FULL PROFESSORSHIPS. PROFESSORS ARE ALSO GIVEN INCENTIVES TO SPEND THEIR SABBATICALS

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IN RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS. (REF B)

6.(C) COMMENT: WHILE THERE ARE APPARENTLY, LEGITIMATE COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE QUALITY OF IAU EDUCATION, AHMADINEJAD'S ACTIONS MAY HAVE OTHER MOTIVATIONS. IF AHMADINEJAD IS SUCCESSFUL IN WRESTING CONTROL OVER IAU AWAY FROM RAFSANJANI, HE WINS TWO WAYS -- DIRECTLY DIMINISHING THE POWER OF HIS RIVAL AND OPENING NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO ASSERT HIMSELF IDEOLOGICALLY OVER MORE THAN 70 CAMPUSES THAT COMprise THE IAU. THE ADVICE IN REF A FROM ANOTHER UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATOR THAT IAU CAMPUSES MAY BE IN A BETTER POSITION TO ENGAGE WITH THE US BECAUSE OF THEIR RELATIVE INDEPENDENCE COULD BE IN QUESTION.

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